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ABSTRACT

The monograph emphasizes the need for university-sponsored programs for professionals serving ethnic communities. The programs could consist of undergraduate and inservice courses in teacher education. The courses should teach students and teachers to accept and understand cultural differences, to recognize the right of such differences to exist, to investigate the origin of stereotypes, and to examine one's own attitudes toward various ethnic groups. This approach to enhancing knowledge and increasing empathy would be interdisciplinary, with emphasis on history, psychology, education, geography, political science, economics, sociology, cultural anthropology, art, literature, and film. Inservice courses can be designed to meet participants' needs through preliminary brainstorming and problem-solving sessions. A knowledge of the special characteristics of neighborhoods, demonstrations of non-verbal communication, and discussions of the varieties of language and dialects should also be included. Participants should be encouraged to develop their own resources, create bibliographies, and consult experts. (KC)

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Ethnic Studies in the University

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Ethnic Studies in the University

The United States, like many other countries, is a nation composed of countless minority groups. As a nation we are now concerned with trying to integrate members of these groups as full participants in society through a variety of programs and laws, while simultaneously we are reassessing past attitudes and policies toward minorities. This activity has led to a proliferation of studies about immigration, past and present, and the characteristics of minority groups in general. The complexity of this task is constantly spiraling.

Even the definition of minority status is difficult. Minority status may be seen as an inferior position to one group and may be perceived as an elite position by another group. This variation in perception frequently depends upon the power wielded by the groups in question. Thus minority status can be expressed in terms of socio-economic status, social aspirations, civil rights, or even as a psychological phenomenon. The study of a community of varying ethnic groups, or different races and religions, requires special teaching efforts.

Since the 1920's the United States has experienced traumatic changes, most notably those of the great depression and the Second World War. The flow of immigrants from Europe almost stopped in the 1930's and early 1940's, except for the few intellectuals who fled from Hitler's Europe. The internal movement of migrants did not cease, however. New residents appeared in the old ghettos: rural blacks, Appalachian whites, Puerto Ricans, and the Southwest, the Mexican Americans. Now we are faced with a new influx of Asians: the Vietnamese refugees. As affluence, more education through the "G.I. bill," and the post-war industrial development

occurred, blacks began to achieve middle class status in ever larger numbers, and their demands grew for greater equality and civil rights. They developed their own cultural institutions within their communities, increased their pride in their heritage and identity. The decolonization of Africa stimulated greater self-awareness. As the blacks' interest in their past traditions increased, others began to search for their own roots. Second and especially third generation Americans looked backward to their origin and cultural patterns, exemplifying Hansen's "law." As the tempo of social change produced challenges to the existing value systems, many examined their past to discover new ideals and security based on their own historical identity. Interest in minorities grew and Americans began to explore possibilities of a "pluralistic" society rather than that of the "melting-pot."

Continuing acts of discrimination, somewhat less blatant overall than those of 25 or 50 years ago, have challenged this interest. Economic recession or depression, leading to lay-offs in order of seniority, which conflict with non-discrimination hiring mandates, lead to civil disorder in some minority groups. Political crisis leads to conflicts among various groups whose goals and perceptions differ. After decades of interfaith commissions, interfaith proclamations, interracial activities, and pressures of every kind for intercultural tolerance, at the very least, hostility and discrimination remain very much in evidence.

To some extent, the resulting ambivalence and contemporary disillusionment have led to a new ethnicity. As a result, non-black minority groups in the 1970's have followed the lead of the blacks of the 1960's. They

draw inward to form pressure groups on their own behalf, waving the threat of votes over recalcitrant legislators. Ethnic consciousness-raising has revived the conflicts between ethnic identity and acculturation in a new generation.

There are also innumerable new influences in education. First, a revolution has resulted from technological advances. This has brought forth an abundance of audio-visual aids of varying quality, quick and easy reproduction of printed material, and rapid computation of mathematical data. Television and other media provide an illuminating supplement to the classroom; if used with discretion, taste, and judgement. A second influence at least during the last decades has been the tremendous increase in travel and the consequent international interaction, often affecting our students. American servicemen during the Second World War, and millions of tourists since the war, became aware of places and peoples outside the United States. Within the nation, people were moving from the country-side (migration) and between countries (immigration) at a more rapid rate than had been true in the pre-war years. Again this brought about an increased interchange of ideas between localities and between countries. Our students have begun to develop interests in exotic places and are more sympathetic to the newcomers to our shores.

The combination of the new technology and a new ethnic awareness led in the 1960's to a proliferation of ethnic study programs, which also helped to spur interest in cultural pluralism. In the last few years, however, colleges and universities in the United States, have become bogged down in a prolonged depression. Cost inflation, falling enrollments, and a surplus of PhDs' have put an end to educational program development and

expansion. The end of economic affluence has meant reduced job opportunities, and has created an emphasis on vocational goals and a frantic concern for economic security among our students. Ethnic study programs are being either eroded or abandoned.

Yet contradictory challenges and problems of cultural pluralism remain a very large part of our contemporary life, and at present our youth needs to be alerted more than ever to the demands of cultural pluralism in a constructive way. In our own society, many differences already exist, and the political and economic arenas do not preclude conflicts and tensions between various groups. Therefore the colleges should continue to provide courses and programs to teach our students sensitivity toward those who are different, to promote knowledge of our immigrant past with its injustices, and to instill ethnic pride and self awareness. Teachers of teachers, of policemen, of social workers, and of medical personnel must teach, and prospective professionals must learn, to accept and understand cultural differences, and to recognize the right of such differences to exist. They should explore the origins of stereotypes and question their validity as an aid to coping with and reducing their own prejudices first, and later those of their students. However, to undo all the negative values that may have been acquired in their previous eighteen years of living and schooling, of course, sets the stage for a massive educational task in itself.

It is not enough today to mention isolated incidents of black history or biographies of an occasional non-white leader or to tell teachers and other professionals that they should be devoid of prejudice and avoid discriminatory acts. Nor is a focus on one cultural group an adequate

basis for teaching ethnic studies. We must teach our public servants about the intrinsic role of ethnics in American history and society, their problems, their conflicts, and their characteristics. Brotherhood preaching is not the answer, knowledge is. The student and the later professional, as participants in group dynamics must be more acutely sensitive of his own attitudes and behaviors toward various ethnic groups. They must be even more knowledgeable of language, body, and intellectual nuances which may be very different from their own, and which might prove threatening, if misunderstood. Those of us who teach must create sufficient information for the student to become alerted to inaccuracies, biases, stereotypes, and isolated prejudices that he might encounter in his daily routines. A principal theme that must be constantly emphasized is that to be different does not imply inferiority or superiority. This is after all the essence of a society in which cultural pluralism is accepted and respected.

One of the difficulties we face is that few people are aware of how the same event is perceived by members of different groups. Consider a perfectly neutral behavior that has no racial or ethnic undertones. An individual, Person A, perceives a principle involved in a situation. He fights for that principle over an extended period of time. He is, in a word, persistent. Person B, who does not accept that a principle is involved, calls Person A stubborn, not persistent. A difference in viewpoint is in evidence. If we turn instead to male-female behaviors, what is socially acceptable in males as "driving ambition" is perceived negatively in females as "aggressiveness." This principle holds, too for different ethnic or racial groups. What is perceived by one American as "clever" strategy by another American becomes

"sneaky" if an Asian does the same thing, or "crafty" if a Jew does it. Similarly, the Asian and Jew do not perceive majority behaviors from the same perspective as a majority group member. There is an urgent need to increase sensitivity overall on all sides if the current movement toward a culturally pluralistic society is to become viable.

Teacher education should be strengthened in this area of content. Although often mentioned, most schools do not stress the significance and problems of cultural diversity. Now, in a period of financial retrenchment and student concern with more "practical" courses, these programs are diminishing. We recommend that the new courses not be abandoned. Indeed, they should be strengthened, with their function shifted and more fully developed as adjuncts to the requirements in schools of education, social work, law enforcement, nursing, etc. Teachers and other professionals should be apprised of the importance of cultural diversity in their preparation, although because of the complexity and cultural wealth of innumerable groups, no one can master all the varieties of experience extant in American life. However, professionals and counselors, in contact with culturally different groups must become empathetic, knowledgeable, and able to work with the people in such groups. A productive way for professionals to serve their communities and schools is to be trained in programs stressing cultural pluralism that are conducted by local colleges and universities. We feel that in-service courses, educating professionals in the techniques of learning about and working with Chinese, Estonian, Ukrainian, black or Jewish heritages are equally, if not more important than additional credits in method courses. Understanding language, gestures, customs, and history of

these groups leads to the development of empathy and might ease the tremendous schism that now exists between public institutions, including the schools, and individuals in the local communities.

Few States and few programs require ethnic studies or cultural pluralism courses in teacher education curricula or state certification requirements. Unfortunately, this is the case in states with large ethnic populations. Teacher education has not even communicated enough in the present programs to make teachers sensitive to the ways in which they may inadvertently embarrass students by not being attuned to cultural differences.

University professors faced with the demands and needs of our society to train more flexible and understanding people, face an additional challenge. They must confront students inadequately prepared for post secondary education and in the undergraduate curriculum on ethnic studies. Therefore, they should be always cognizant of maintaining intellectual standards that aid their students to achieve more than affective learning.

Our experience has indicated that a sound approach to the two aims: enhancing knowledge and increasing empathy, is some form of multi-disciplinary teaching. In our case, we have been able to utilize team teaching in our course - but whether two or more instructors are available - the most effective training demands the inclusion of history, psychology, and education, as well as geography, political science, economics, cultural anthropology, and sociology. Art, literature, and film also provide illustrative material and help the student grasp more subtle concepts.

In the present instance, our testing of the students indicated that they had learned. (There was a statistically significant difference in pre- and post-test scores). These test results were not nearly so reinforcing to us as teachers, however, as were the comments of the students who made a point of stopping by after the course ended to relate their enthusiasm for the course.

We were also desirous of enhancing our students' self esteem and ethnic pride. One of the tools we used to accomplish this aim was to assign a paper in which they related their family history. Incorporated into the paper, primarily to sharpen analytical skills, was the demand that students compare and contrast their ethnic heritage with another studied in class. The results were gratifying. Although many papers were poorly written, and some students had difficulty with abstract concepts, they told us they enjoyed writing the essay (an unusual reaction) and many told us how proud they were of their parents and their forebears.

The techniques used in undergraduate instruction, of course, must be revised for in-service courses. These should be expressly designed in terms of the participants' work experience and needs. Often these courses may be designed as workshops. Included in the overall syllabus we recommend problem-solving meetings and brainstorming sessions created to meet special needs of the participants. Also included should be knowledge of the neighborhoods and their special characteristics, demonstrations of non-verbal communication, and discussions of the varieties of language and dialects. Students should be encouraged to develop their own resources, to create bibliographies, and to consult experts in various specialties which could provide support and the training needed for their jobs. Examination of

attitudes and knowledge of various groups not only should be included, but also the development of criteria to evaluate bias in instructional and other materials. The goal of such courses would be ultimately the development of resourceful behaviors by professionals serving ethnic communities.

Whether the coursework is taken as part of an in-service program or in the traditional pre-service college curriculum, the concepts taught in immigrant history or "ethnic studies" courses can help to promote greater awareness on the part of our students. However, we must recognize the limitations of university education. We cannot eradicate bias, nor make all workers sensitive, informed and of good will. The most we can do is educate and hope that knowledge will ameliorate the areas of conflict and disagreement within our society.